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Follow my Leader? A Cross-National Analysis of Leadership Effects in Parliamentary Democracies

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A b s t r a c t

It has been argued that an increasing focus on leaders in election campaigns together with a decline in partisanship amongst voters means that even in parliamentary elections voters are now more likely to vote on the basis of their evaluations of leaders rather than parties. This ‘presidentialisation’ of parliamentary elections might be particularly thought likely to have happened where a majoritarian rather than a proportional electoral system is used. These claims are tested using data from the first wave of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems Project. No evidence is found to support the claim that voters are more likely to vote on the basis of leader evaluations in countries where levels of party identification are low or where a majoritarian electoral system is in place. It is suggested these negative findings may have been obtained because the presidentialisation thesis may have taken insufficient account of the ability of leaders in parliamentary democracies to shape the strategy and appeal of the parties that they lead.

Introduction

It has become quite common in discussions of how the electoral process is developing at the turn of the millennium to suggest that parliamentary elections have become ‘presidentialised’. It is argued that although parliamentary elections were once devices that either secured the election of a legislature whose party political composition is broadly representative of public opinion or else the election of a government formed by a single political party (or a pre-election coalition) they have now become an occasion for voters to choose between alternative candidates for prime minister. This change has come about, it is argued, both because of changes in the way that elections are fought and in the motivations that voters bring to the ballot box.

In making this claim it is also sometimes argued that some forms of parliamentary election are more susceptible to this trend than others. We have already referred to the traditional distinction between elections being about the election of a representative legislature or about the election of an alternative government. This distinction is of course embodied in the difference between proportional electoral systems that allocate seats in the legislature such that the proportion of seats each party wins is at least broadly proportional to the share of the overall vote that they win, and majoritarian systems that either formally or in practice tend to ensure that bigger parties, and mostly importantly of all the biggest party, secure a significantly larger share of the seats than they do of the votes such that one party may well indeed be able to win an overall majority (Lijphart, 1999). Elections conducted under the latter type of electoral system have traditionally been regarded as a choice between alternative governments and it is these that it is now suggested are the ones that are most susceptible to the trend towards presidentialisation.

Although such claims may be commonly made (Bean and Mughan, 1989; Glaser and Salmon, 1991; Mughan, 1993; Mughan, 1995; Swanson and Mancini, 1996), they have been little tested. They of course require two rather different types of analysis. The argument that parliamentary elections have become more presidential requires us to examine the relationship between leader evaluations and voting behaviour over time. Although some attempts have been made at this within individual countries, the analysis of the impact of leader evaluations on voting behaviour in parliamentary democracies (as opposed to the presidential system of the United States) has been notable for its paucity rather than its extent (McAllister, 1996). It certainly has not been systematically examined across a range of polities. Meanwhile the claim that elections conducted under majoritarian electoral systems are particularly likely to have become presidentialised requires the systematic collection of data on leadership evaluations and voting behaviour across countries with different voting systems. To our knowledge at least such data have simply not existed until now.

This paper is a first step at filling some of these gaps. It uses data on leadership evaluations, party evaluations and voting behaviour collected on a systematic basis across a range of countries by the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project (<http://www.umich.edu:80/~nes/cses/cses.htm>) to provide a direct test of the claim that elections conducted under majoritarian electoral systems are more presidential than those conducted under more proportional systems, together with an indirect test of the claim that parliamentary elections in general have become more presidential. In the event we find little support for either argument. We suggest that the importance of leaders in the electoral process lies not, as the presidentialisation thesis implies, in judgements that voters make about leaders independently of their parties but rather in the judgements that voters make about parties as a result of the messages that are conveyed about those parties by their leaders.

The Presidentialisation Thesis

As we noted in the introduction there are two strands to the argument that parliamentary elections have been turned into presidential contests. One refers to developments in the way that elections are fought while the other refers to changes in the motivations that voters bring to the ballot box. We will describe each of these briefly in turn.

The first argument is essentially a claim that parliamentary elections are increasingly being fought as if they were presidential contests. The demands and opportunities created by television in particular have ensured that the reporting of election campaigns has come to be concentrated increasingly on the activities of leaders. Television, it is argued, needs relatively accessible visual images to project messages, and the personality of a politician provides an image that no party manifesto can ever hope to match. At the same time, television cannot necessarily afford to have camera crews following a wide range of leading party politicians on the campaign trail and thus they tend to focus on the activities of the leader. The parties themselves respond to these pressures by focusing their campaigns on their leader, whose image and personality can after all be conveyed across the nation by television in a manner that cannot be achieved by any other means of communication. The parties may even agree to their leader participating in a televised debate with all the other party leaders, debates that are similar in style to those which have now become a fixture of US presidential elections, while the print media are not immune to the increased focus of election campaigns on leaders (Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg, 2000: 51). In short, election campaigns have in effect become gladiatorial contests between the party leaders fought out on the small screen.

The second argument in contrast refers to relatively well worn themes about how voters' motivations and behaviour have changed. At its heart is the claim that modern electorates have experienced a process of partisan dealignment. According to this thesis, voters now largely lack the strong emotional attachment to a political party that many of them once enjoyed, an attachment that helped bring about the development of party identification theory (Campbell et al, 1960). For voters with a strong party attachment or identity, political parties were a vital cue, shaping their views about both policies and leaders. Thus, for example, they would be inclined to favour a particular policy position if it were adopted by the political party with which they identified, while they would be likely to oppose it if were proposed by some other party. And equally, they would tend to like a party leader, irrespective of their personal qualities, if that leader were the leader of their own party, and to dislike them if they were leading a different party.

For so long as voters had motivations like these, leadership evaluations could have little or no independent impact on voting behaviour. They were after all simply derivative of party identification. But if, as has been widely argued is the case (Dalton, 2000; Franklin, Mackie and Valen, 1992; Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995), fewer voters now have a strong party identification, not least perhaps because in the television age voters are exposed to a wider range of messages than was previously the case, then other possible influences can be expected to play a role in their decision about how to vote. Amongst those other influences might be what they think about the issues at stake or of the merits of the alternative leaders with whom they have been presented. And of course they have every incentive to focus on the latter if indeed the first argument that leaders themselves have become more prominent in election campaigns is correct.

Even so, there may be institutional constraints on the degree to which evaluations of leaders rather than, say, party positions on issues, can fill the void left by the decline of party identification. Indeed even some of the strongest advocates of theories of partisan dealignment have expressed doubts about the degree to which parliamentary elections as opposed to presidential elections either have or are likely to become beauty contests between the leading candidates for prime minister (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). But if that view is correct, the institutional constraints would appear to be greater in parliamentary elections fought under a majoritarian electoral system than in the case of those fought under more proportional ones.

Elections fought under a majoritarian electoral system can in many respects appear to be functional equivalents of presidential contests. If such a system facilitates the dominance of electoral representation by two parties (or at least two blocks of parties) then the election is likely to determine who will hold executive office. There is no need for any process of post-electoral coalition bargaining to determine who will grasp the reins of power. In this situation, elections are less about who will provide representation in the legislature and more about who will form the next government. And of course the most powerful office in that government is the post of prime minister. So we might therefore anticipate that under majoritarian electoral systems at least evaluations of leaders have acquired an importance in determining how voters behave that they may well still not have where a more proportional electoral system is in use.

However, we should also be aware of another perspective on this question. Perhaps what matters most in determining the importance of leader evaluations is not the method of election, but rather the size of the party. After all, even when a proportional method of election is in use, when a number of parties are able to secure significant representation in

the legislature, and when post-election coalition bargaining is likely to have to take place, it is still likely to be the case that only the leaders of the larger parties have any realistic prospect of becoming prime minister. So if voters do have a particular interest in the qualities of who is to hold the highest political office in the land, that could well mean that while they take into account what they think of the leaders of large parties they take far less account of the qualities of the leaders of smaller ones. So we might find that evaluations of the leaders of big parties matter more than those of small ones, and indeed that this is true irrespective of the electoral system that is in place.

Data and Method

To test these propositions we use data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) project (<http://www.umich.edu/~nes/cses/cses.htm>). This project is a voluntary collaboration between national election studies across the world. Each country devotes about ten minutes of questionnaire time to asking a module of questions in a common format while at the same time also collecting a range of commonly coded socio-economic background information. In each case the data are collected as soon as possible immediately after an election has been held. This means of course that rather than being undertaken at one point in time the data collection is spread across a number of years. In our case we are analysing data collected as part of the first wave of collaboration that took place between 1996 and 2000.

This first wave of collaboration was designed to focus on three subjects. These were the impact of different electoral systems on the way that people vote, the role of social cleavages in voting behaviour, and what influences people's evaluations of their system of government. This paper is an example of the first of these. Like the project as a whole, it gains its analytic purchase on its subject by the opportunity that is created to examine how relationships between variables collected by the surveys vary according to the

institutional context of the participant countries. In other words we can analyse how far electoral systems affect the impact of leadership evaluations on the way that people vote by examining how far the relationship between leadership evaluations and vote varies between countries according to the kind of electoral system that they employ in their parliamentary elections.

The CSES project collected three simple but crucial pieces of information of relevance to our purposes here. First, respondents were asked to state on a scale ranging from 0 to 10 how much they liked or disliked each of the main party leaders. Normally, evaluations of up to six party leaders were collected in each country, with information being gathered on each of the party leaders whose party enjoyed significant representation in that country's legislature. The relationship between these evaluations and vote then provides us with our crucial indicator of the impact of leadership evaluations on vote.

Second, using exactly the same scale the CSES project also asked respondents how much they liked or disliked each of the main political parties. We have seen that the presidentialisation thesis argues that evaluations of leaders comprise one of the factors at least that has come to replace evaluations of parties in voters' decisions. This implies that rather than just looking at the variation between countries in the relationship between leadership evaluations and vote, we should be examining the variation in the relative importance of leadership and party evaluations. By deploying the party like and dislike data as well, we can adopt this approach.

Finally, the CSES project also collected data on party identification in a systematically comparable manner across countries. It is this information that provides us with an opportunity to implement an indirect test of the claim that evaluations of leaders have become more important because of a decline in the proportion of voters who feel a sense of party identification. Of particular interest to us is the proportion of people in each

country who claim a party identification. If the presidentialisation thesis is correct and applies to parliamentary elections then we would expect that leadership evaluations would be more important in those countries with relatively low levels of party identification. The presence or otherwise of a party identification was collected by the CSES by asking respondents, 'Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party'? Our indicator of the level of party identification in each country is the proportion that responded positively to this question.¹

By now it should be apparent to the reader that these data allow us to do more than examine how the relationship between leader evaluations and vote varies between countries. After all we have information on leader and party evaluations for each of the main parties within each country. And as we have already acknowledged such evaluations may well be more important to voters in deciding whether to vote for a big party whose leader has a realistic chance of becoming Prime Minister than it is in deciding whether to vote for a small party whose leader does not have any such prospect. It might be the case too that a small party leader finds it more difficult to convert personal popularity into votes because of strategic disincentives to voting for a small party.

We have then a data structure that allows us to examine how the role of leadership evaluations in the voting decision varies according to the characteristics of both countries and parties. To exploit this opportunity we adopt a very simple two stage approach. In the first stage we acquire an estimate of the impact of leadership evaluations on vote for each party in each country. This is done by undertaking a simple linear regression of vote, dichotomised as 1 if the respondent voted for the party in question and 0 otherwise, against leader evaluations using the individual level data for the relevant country. We

¹ Those who said 'no' were asked a follow-up question, 'Do you feel yourself a little closer to one of the political parties than the others', but we have taken no account of the incidence of these 'leaners' in our analysis.

also acquire a similar estimate for the role of party evaluations by undertaking exactly the same procedure for these. Together the resulting two equations equip us with two simple linear regression coefficients for each party in each country, one of which measures the strength of the association between leadership evaluations and vote, the other the strength of the association between party evaluations and vote.²

It is these coefficients that then become the focus of our analysis in the second stage. We analyse how the coefficients vary according to the characteristics of the party and of the country in question. In addition to the level of party identification for each country (derived from the relevant CSES data set) we have also coded each country's legislative electoral system according to whether it is primarily majoritarian, proportional or mixed. The last of these categories typically refers to those countries in which some seats are allocated according to a majoritarian principle, some by a proportional method and where the latter are not allocated such as to overcome the disproportionality generated by the outcome in the former.³ Details of how we have classified each country's electoral system can be found in Table 1 below.⁴ Meanwhile we also collected for each party the share of the vote that it won at the election to which the CSES data refers, thereby enabling us to distinguish between big and small parties.

² We are course aware that normally a logit or probit procedure would be preferable in the analysis of a dichotomous dependent variable. Linear regression gives us however a more easily interpreted metric for the second stage of our analysis described in the next paragraph.

³ Our principle source of information on the characteristics of each country's electoral system was Reynolds and Reilly (1997), supplemented where necessary by consultation with a range of appropriate Internet sites.

⁴ We also classified countries according to the maturity of their democracy in case this might have influenced or confounded our results. For example, we might anticipate that leader evaluations are more important in countries where democracy has not been in place for long and where as a result voters do not have a clear impression of the standpoint of the various parties. In the event this proved not to be the case and thus we have not included it in the results reported here.

In the event we were able to implement this procedure successfully for seventy parties that fight elections in some 15 different countries. These countries, detailed in table 1, represent a subset of those countries for which data were made available as part of the first release of CSES data in June 2000, a release that largely comprises countries that held elections in 1996 and 1997. Five countries had to be excluded from our analysis because of difficulties with the analysis or interpretation of the available data. Meanwhile, because of differences in their party systems, we have excluded Scotland and Wales from our analysis of the British data and Quebec from that of Canada.⁵ In two cases, the USA and Taiwan, the legislative election that we are analysing took place at the same time as a presidential election, and our leader evaluations are therefore of the relevant presidential candidates. As we might anticipate that this would reduce the impact of leadership evaluations on legislative vote choice in these two countries, but excluding these two countries from the analyses reported here in fact made no difference to our substantive findings.

⁵ It should also be noted that our stage one analyses for all countries were conducted on unweighted data because the available documentation did not always make it possible to establish how any weighting variables should be used.

Table 1
Countries Analysed and their Electoral Systems

Type of Electoral System		
Proportional	Majoritarian	Mixed
Czech Republic	Australia	Japan
Germany	Canada	Mexico
Hungary	Great Britain	
New Zealand	USA	
Netherlands		
Norway		
Poland		
Spain		
Taiwan		

Results

We have in effect developed three hypotheses in this paper so far. First, leadership evaluations are more important in influencing vote choice in those countries with low levels of party identification than in those with high levels. Second, leadership evaluations are more important in influencing vote choice in parliamentary elections held under majoritarian electoral systems than in those held under proportional ones. And third, we have suggested that leadership evaluations might matter more in voters' decisions to vote for a big party than for a smaller one.

Table 2 provides a simple test of these three propositions. In the first column it shows the mean regression coefficient we obtained for the impact of leadership evaluations on vote choice broken down separately by level of party identification, type of electoral system, and type of party. A dealigned country was defined as one where less than 50% had a

reasonably close party identification while a big party was considered to be one that obtained 25% or more of the valid vote, an operationalisation that usually distinguished the two largest parties in a country from the remainder. Meanwhile, the second column shows the mean difference between the leadership regression coefficient and that obtained from regressing party evaluation on vote choice, again broken down separately by our three sets of categories.

Table 2
Variation in the Impact of Leadership Evaluations

	Mean Regression Coefficient for Leader Evaluations	Leader Evaluations -Party Evaluations	
<i>Type of Electoral System</i>			
Majoritarian	.23	-.40	(14)
Mixed	.09	-.54	(9)
Proportional	.14	-.40	(47)
<i>Level of Alignment</i>			
Dealigned	.15	-.43	(51)
Not dealigned	.18	-.40	(19)
<i>Party Size</i>			
Big party	.24	-.55	(28)
Not big party	.10	-.33	(42)
All	.15	-.42	(70)

Let us consider first of all the pattern of our leadership coefficients. Here we appear to obtain some support for two out of our three propositions. Leadership evaluations appear to be more strongly related to vote choice where an election is held using a majoritarian electoral system and where the leader is at the head of a big party rather than a small one. The one argument for which we cannot find any support is that leadership evaluations are more important where relatively few voters feel reasonably close to a political party.

But this of course raises an immediate question. Majoritarian electoral systems are usually thought to reduce fragmentation of the party system. So perhaps the reason why we have found that leadership evaluations matter more for big parties than for small ones is that big parties are more common where a majoritarian electoral system is in place. Perhaps once we have allowed for this we will find that the relationship between size of party and the impact of leadership evaluations disappears. Or equally of course it may be that it is our relationship between type of electoral system and the impact of leadership evaluations that is the spurious one.

Table 3
The Impact of Leadership Evaluations,
Electoral System and Party Size

Type of Electoral System	Party Size	
	Big	Not Big
Majoritarian	.33 (7)	.12 (7)
Mixed	.15 (5)	.02 (4)
Proportional	.23 (16)	.10 (31)

Main cell entries show the mean leadership coefficient.

In fact it is the second speculation that appears to be closer to the truth. In Table 3 we analyse our leadership regression coefficients by both type of electoral system and party size at the same time. Two points emerge. First, leadership evaluations are more closely related to vote in the case of big parties rather than small parties, irrespective of the kind of electoral system that is being used. Indeed typically party leader evaluations only have a small impact on vote choice if they are leaders of small parties. Second, however, there is a hint that amongst big parties themselves, leadership evaluations are indeed more closely related to vote where a majoritarian electoral system is in place. In short, it appears that where a party leader is indeed in a situation where they are most likely to be presented as an alternative Prime Minister then evaluations of their qualities are indeed taken into account by the electorate.

But we need to pause a little before we jump to this conclusion and return once more to the findings in Table 2, looking this time at our findings on the difference between the size of our leadership coefficients and our party ones. If we are to be able to claim that leaders do at least matter so far as voters' decisions to vote for big parties are concerned, then we should also be able to demonstrate that our leadership coefficients for these parties are relatively more important compared with our party ones – and perhaps particularly so where a majoritarian electoral system is in place.

However, the right hand column of Table 2 does not show this to be the case. Note first of all in fact that all of our average differences between the two coefficients are negative. In other words how favourably a respondent evaluates a party is typically more strongly related to vote choice than is how favourably they evaluated a party leader. This perhaps should not surprise us. After all it is parties rather than leaders that voters were being asked to vote for in these parliamentary elections, so our party evaluation questions

potentially come close to being tantamount to inviting respondents to redescribe how they have voted. Nonetheless, this finding is a warning as to the apparent limits to which parliamentary elections have been presidentialised, irrespective of the kind of electoral system under which such elections are conducted.⁶

At the same time, the right hand column of Table 2 also shows that our leadership coefficients are smaller relative to the size of our party ones in the case of big parties than they are in the case of small parties. Moreover, if we subject these coefficient differences to the same kind of analysis as we did the leadership coefficients alone in Table 3 then, as Table 4 shows, we discover that having a majoritarian electoral system in place does little to change this picture.

Table 4
The Relative Impact of Leader and Party Evaluations,
Electoral System and Party Size

Type of Electoral System	Party Size	
	Big	Not Big
Majoritarian	-.49 (7)	-.31 (7)
Mixed	-.61 (5)	-.45 (4)
Proportional	-.56 (16)	-.32 (31)

Main cell entries show the mean difference between the leadership and the party coefficient.

So far our analysis has been informal. But a series of more formal analyses, the results of which are shown in Table 5, confirm the story that we have told so far. In that table we show the results of four linear regression models. In the first two our dependent variable comprises the stage one regression coefficients for leader evaluations and vote, while in

⁶ Note indeed that if we calculate equivalent coefficients for presidential vote choice in the US that the leadership coefficient is then larger than the party coefficient.

the second two it consists of the difference between the leader coefficient and its relevant party counterpart. The difference between models (a) and (b) lies in the metric used to measure ‘dealigned’ and ‘big party’. In the case of (a) these are the % of people in the relevant country with a close party identification and the % of people voting for that party respectively, while in the case of (b) they are dichotomous variables in which those coded 1 are parties in countries where over half have a close party identification and parties winning over a quarter of the vote respectively. Meanwhile, in both cases, ‘majoritarian’ refers to those electoral systems that we have classified as majoritarian, while ‘big party and majoritarian’ is coded 1 if the party won over 25% of the vote under a majoritarian electoral system, zero otherwise.

Table 5
Formal Analysis of Variations in Impact of Leadership Evaluations on Vote

	Leader Evaluations		Leader Evaluations -Party Evaluations	
	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)
Majoritarian	+0.016 (.044)	+0.026 (.046)	+0.018 (.096)	+0.031 (.100)
Dealigned	+0.000 (.001)	-0.015 (.031)	+0.003 (.002)	-0.009 (.063)
Big Party	+0.006*** (.001)	+0.117*** (.031)	-0.010*** (.002)	-0.237*** (.067)
Big Party & Majoritarian	+0.042 (.064)	+0.088 (.068)	+0.097 (.141)	.044 (.146)
Constant	+0.021	+0.104	-0.381	-0.329
Adj. R ²	40%	30%	24%	14%

* coefficient significant at the 1% level.

Figures in brackets are standard errors.

If we look first at the results of our analysis of the leader coefficients, we can see that, irrespective of how we measure ‘dealigned’ and ‘big party’, leader evaluations are indeed more closely related to vote in the case of big parties than small ones. However, when we examine the results of our analysis of the difference between the leader and the party coefficients we discover that leader evaluations are relatively less important in the case of big parties. Meanwhile in none of our models do either the level of party identification or the kind of electoral system appear to have an impact on the importance of leader evaluations in the decision about how to vote.

Discussion

Two principal findings emerge from this research. First, at least so far as parliamentary elections are concerned, we cannot find any evidence to support the central claim of the presidentialisation thesis, viz. that leader evaluations become more important when party identification is low. While our test of this thesis has been an indirect one, comparing the strength of association between leader evaluations and vote in those countries with high levels of close party identification and those with low, it is at minimum surprising that we did not find that leader evaluations were more closely related to vote in those countries where party identification was lower if indeed the thesis is correct. It appears that we should concur with Dalton and Wattenburg (2000) that the institutional form of parliamentary elections inhibits the degree to which voters are ever likely to use leader evaluations as a basis on which to decide how to vote.

Second, amongst parliamentary elections themselves, leadership evaluations do at first glance appear to be more closely related to people’s vote choice in the case of big parties than small ones and perhaps especially so where a majoritarian electoral system is in

place. It thus seems as though leadership evaluations do matter when a leader does appear to be a potential alternative prime minister. However, we have also discovered that voters' evaluations of parties are more clearly related to their vote choice for big parties too. In fact relatively speaking, leadership evaluations actually matter less in the case of big parties than they do for smaller ones. In short, leadership evaluations are more closely related to vote for big parties only because vote choice in general is more firmly structured for such parties.

We have then found little or no support for the presidentialisation thesis in any of its various guises. However, we do not want readers simply to come away with the impression that our research shows that leaders have little electoral relevance in countries that hold parliamentary elections. We have in effect been examining claims that leaders have become more important than parties as a cue in the voting decision. But arguably such an expectation is always likely to be a misguided one in a parliamentary democracy. It might make sense in a country like the United States with a weak party system as well as a presidential system to conceive of leaders demonstrating their importance by campaigning separately from their parties. But in a parliamentary democracy a powerful leader can be expected to demonstrate their influence by being able to shape the image of the party that they lead. If so then leaders matter not because of their ability to win votes independently of their party on the basis of their personal appeal but rather because they have a decisive impact on voters' evaluations of the parties that they lead.

Such a perspective does not deny the possibility of a presidentialisation thesis. But it is one of a rather different kind to that analysed here. If parties' sources of electoral support are determined less strongly now by traditional sociological and ideological cleavages, they may well have more incentive and indeed opportunity to change the image that they portray in the hope of increasing their support (Kircheimer, 1966: Epstein, 1967). Meanwhile as the decline of traditional social ties brings about a decline in the role of the

mass party and the dominance of television in election campaigns makes national election campaigns centred around leaders the most important part of any party's campaign, so leaders may well find themselves better able to influence what the electoral strategy and appeal of their party should be (Farrell and Webb, 2000; Scarrow, Webb and Farrell, 2000). If these suppositions are correct, then amongst parliamentary democracies at least presidentialisation may take the form of more powerful leaders better able to shape and reshape the images of their parties in their own likeness rather than the advent of leaders whose appeal is different and distinct from that of their parties.

But testing such a thesis would require a very different approach to that adopted here. First we would need to examine whether party leaders have become more powerful in shaping the electoral strategy of their parties. For that there does indeed appear to be some evidence (Katz and Mair, 1995; Farrell and Webb, 2000; Scarrow, Webb and Farrell, 2000). And second we would need to examine whether the images that voters have of leaders have in fact become more similar to those that they have of parties. So far as we are aware this second step has not been taken, and indeed we suspect that in most if not all countries it is unlikely that the necessary data exist to do so.

At the same time we should acknowledge that there are still some methodological hurdles for us to cross in this research before we can be sure that we have placed the version of the presidentialisation thesis that we have examined here in the dustbin of history. First, we have as yet only been able to test the thesis in a relatively small number of countries, and certainly we can make no particular claims for the representativeness or otherwise of those that have been included in this analysis. It may be that stronger evidence of the relative importance of leadership effects will emerge in those parliamentary democracies not included here but for which CSES data will eventually be available. Meanwhile the availability of data from a range of presidential elections would certainly enable us to

compare the role of leadership effects in parliamentary and presidential elections to a more significant extent than we have been able so far.

Second, we are aware that objections may be made to the approach that we have adopted to the analysis of the data we do have available to us. In our first stage analysis we have constructed simple linear coefficients without controls. We might, for example, attempt to establish the relative importance of leader as opposed to party evaluations by examining partial regression coefficients for leader evaluations with party evaluations also included in the model. And we might too have considered constructing measures of which party or leader the voter liked most and examining how these are related to vote choice rather than simply looking at the relationship between their liking for each party or leader and vote decision in isolation.

More fundamentally perhaps we could consider integrating the two stages of our analysis. Rather than first constructing measures of association for each party and then analysing these measures of association by the characteristics of the parties and their electoral environment, we might construct an individual level model in which we measure the impact of the electoral environment through appropriate interaction terms. This model would adopt the form:-

$$\text{Vote} = \text{Party Evaluation} + \text{Leader Evaluation} + \text{Leader Evaluation} * \text{Party Size} + \text{Leader Evaluation} * \text{Majoritarian} + \text{etc.}$$

Thus, for example, if evaluations of leaders matter more in the case of big parties or where a majoritarian system is in place then we should obtain significant positive coefficients for the relevant interaction terms. Note in particular that such a model could also be constructed to estimate the interaction between evaluations and both a voter's own personal level of party identification and that in the country as a whole. To estimate

such a model we would however have to ‘stack’ the original data set so that each combination of respondent and party represents a single case in the analysed data set (van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996).

But of course all of these possible elaborations come with a cost – complexity. And none will overcome the fact that our test of the claim that leadership evaluations become more important as party identification declines is but an indirect one. In any event, we would suggest that if the variants of the presidentialisation thesis that we have tested here are correct then we should have been able to observe clear and systematic differences in the coefficients upon which we have chosen to focus. There seems little reason to us to suggest that the methodology we have adopted is one that is biased against the validation of the hypotheses we have been examining.

Conclusion

This paper casts severe doubt on claims that leaders have become more important vis-à-vis parties in voters’ electoral calculus in parliamentary democracies as a result of declining levels of party identification. It also casts doubt upon a more refined proposition that this at least is true of those parliamentary democracies that have a majoritarian electoral system. In parliamentary democracies at least, voters’ evaluations of leaders do not appear to have become a substitute for their evaluations of parties in deciding how to vote. It may be possible to become president simply by persuading voters to like yourself, but becoming prime minister still involves the task of persuading voters to like as well those who would call themselves your friends.

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